

An excellent specimen of the folk poetry of the Karnataka is a popular poem in which a cow is the heroine. Punyakoti was one of a large herd which Kalinga the cowherd kept. She had a young calf. One day, coming from the forest where the herd had gone to graze, this cow was waylaid by a tiger. She pleaded for her life saying she had a young calf but in vain. Then the cow said: "Let me go to my calf for this evening. I shall give him suck and come back/' The tiger doubted the cow. "Surely, you will not come back if *I* let you go." "I will," said the cow, "believe me." The tiger took the promise and let the cow go. Punyakoti came to the farm, gave suck to the calf, told the other cows what had happened, begged them to look after her young one, advised the young calf himself to be careful in pen and forest, and prepared to go. The other mothers and the calf tried to dissuade Punyakoti. Whoever gave such a promise to a tiger and thought of keeping it? Punyakoti was firm. She had given her word and would keep it. She returned to the forest. When the tiger saw the cow come back as she had promised he was so struck with respect for her that

he would not take her life. He said that
God would
not approve of his taking such a good life
and gave up
his own life. The cow returned and there
was great
rejoicing in the farm.